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SUBJECT: CBP HELPS TRANSFORM MEXICAN CUSTOMS

11. (SBU) Summary. The Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Agency is a natural partner with Mexican Customs (Aduanas). CBP plays an integral role in transforming Aduanas from a revenue collection agency to a law enforcement entity capable of preventing contraband from flowing across our common border, tackling immigration and trade issues at its southern border, and providing front-line border defense. End Summary

Transformation Did Not Begin with Merida

12. (SBU) Relations between CBP and Aduanas strengthened in the aftermath of 9/11 with the development of the U.S. Mexico Smart Border Accord (2002). The need for greater border security placed increasing pressure upon trade and travel infrastructure along the southwest border. In June 2005 the governments of Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. implemented the Security Prosperity Partnership (SPP). Under the auspices of the SPP, Aduanas and CBP collaborated on programs to strengthen security while facilitating the movement of people and goods. By 2007, many of the key SPP deliverables were either implemented or underway.

13. (SBU) In moving beyond the SPP framework, CBP and Aduanas implemented the Bilateral Strategic Plan (BSP) in August 12007. Through the BSP, Mexico's Aduanas, CBP, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) established working groups dedicated to strengthening law enforcement and enhancing security, while improving trade partnerships, promoting border efficiencies, and professionalizing border law enforcement agencies. Merida Initiative (MI) funding has complemented this initiative and has provided the resources to accelerate Aduanas's transformation into a capable law enforcement partner. Merida funds provides support to vet Aduanas agents (using the same criteria applied to other Mexican federal police forces), to purchase canine and non-intrusive inspection equipment, and to share technical advice and best practices so that Aduanas can be more closely aligned with CBP.

More Than Money and Equipment

14. (SBU) CBP and Aduanas coordinate efforts to share information and data, the life blood of effective joint enforcement efforts. Under the BSP, CBP and Aduanas coordinate inbound and outbound enforcement operations to stop the flow of illegal arms and currency across the border.

Two successful pilot operations in Nogales and Eagle Pass provided the necessary momentum to extend the plan to other ports of entry before the end of FY2009. Additionally, Aduanas just hired 1400 new and better trained agents and has asked CBP to provide technical support, basic training, and credibility assessment assistance. These activities are in line with the BSP and supported with MI funding. (see Septel)

¶5. (SBU) The Southern Border Initiative provides further impetus for cross-border coordination with Aduanas. Through the initiative, two CBP teams are already coordinating with their Aduanas counterparts to assess immigration and commerce issues at Mexico's southern border. The teams will present a report to the GOM by early fall.

¶6. (SBU) Aduanas is also developing the Mexican Targeting Center modeled after the CBP National Targeting Center-Cargo Facility. CBP and Aduanas coordinate information and resources to target suspected high-risk shipments destined to Mexico and in some case ultimately destined to the U.S.

¶7. (SBU) In support of the development of Aduanas targeting capabilities, CBP and Aduanas developed the Mexican Fellowship program under which two Aduanas agents are assigned to the CBP National Targeting Center-Cargo to collaborate with CBP in developing targeting rules, sharing data and information, and building support for coordination of targeting efforts for commerce arriving in Mexico.

¶8. (SBU) Finally, CBP plans to share with Aduanas the Passenger Name Record (PNR) program, to complement the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS). The PNR will increase the information and intelligence sharing and targeting capabilities on both sides of the border and be a significant move forward for real time information sharing.

Long Road Ahead

¶9. (SBU) In its evolution from revenue collection to law enforcement, Aduanas faces many challenges internally and from both sides of the border. The GOM is in the process of transforming its Federal Police force and investigators. Aduanas is often considered an afterthought when it comes to funding or inclusion into GOM sponsored law enforcement programs and training. Currently, not all Aduanas agents carry firearms nor are they authorized to arrest suspects at the border. Aduanas relies heavily on the Fiscales, which fall under Aduanas but maintain a high degree of operational autonomy. Before the August 15 wholesale replacement of the Fiscales corps, corruption was rampant. Aduanas is taking steps to train its new force to assume the duties of the Fiscales, as well as clean up internal corruption. But progress will be slow, and difficulties, such as accrediting personnel on extended exchange visits to the U.S., hurt the effort to build capabilities and establish relationships between U.S. and GOM officials. These issues only highlight a few barriers and only represent a cross-section of issues confronting Aduanas at this time.

¶10. (SBU) Comment. CBP and Aduanas share the common goal of strengthening an already established relationship. CBP recognizes that the only way to improve security at the border is to develop Aduanas into a robust, professional law enforcement agency. SPP, BSP, and MI programs each add to this effort, but funding for key initiatives must be sustained if Aduanas's transformation is to be completed. End Comment.

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